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Politicisation of Beedi Workers in Kerala- A Case Study of Dinesh Beedi Co-operative in North Malabar

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Abstract:

It is a peculiar scene in Kerala state rural area that most of the adult male members of the families in an area meet in a nearly teashops and read and listen and discuss current politics over a cup of morning tea. This daily exercise couple with the participation in a day today struggles by unions and political parties make the beedi workers are of the most important working forces in Kerala. One of the important features of the beedi workers movement in Kannur is the effective use of various communication media, enabling the workers and other sections of the rural people to be aware of overall political situation, not only in the state but also in India and the world. Newspapers, magazines, radio programmes etc are available in simple Malayalam and in plenty. Every public meeting or rally including street comers meetings organised by political parties, especially left parties became effective means of communication of political ideas. This is in addition to containing political education organised by political parties in the form of party classes or trade union classes which are basically intensive forms of non-formal education. The emergence of trade union movement in beedi industry was a response to the deplorable labour condition in the industry as well as the larger political and social currents in North Malabar. It played vital role in all the agitations led by beedi workers before and after the independence. The beedi workers through strong agitations acquired the achievements. In beedi establishments like KDB, even the non-wage benefits are fixed through local negotiations with management represented in central society. The trade unions directly participate in implementing the social security scheme.

1. Introduction

Beedi manufacturing is one of the traditional and largely home based industries in India. It is highly labour intensive and engages about 4.4 million workers; of them nearly two third are women and one percent children. It does not involve any machinery at any stage by and large it is producing in unorganised sector. It is labour intensive. No other foreign exchange is involved in this sector. Besides the experience labourer's skill, the only equipment require worker's hand, sieve and a pair of scissors. All these belong to the workers only. Unlike any traditional industries, beedi industry is not subject to competition from modern technology.

Beedi rolling began in the organised sector during the early 20th century but gradually shifted to unorganised sector consisting of house holds, small unincorporated units and worksheds. At present hardly 10 percent of the beedi manufacturing takes place in the organised sector. There are about 80 thousand beedi workers in North Malabar under organised and unorganised sectors Of this 25 percent belong to organised sector and the rest 75 percent are under unorganised sector.

The Kerala Dinesh Beedi workers Central Co-operative society Ltd was organised and registered in February 1968 to rehabilitate the erstwhile beedi workers who were thrown out from the Mangalore centered beedi companies in North Malabar. It provides employment to 20,000 workers of Kannur, Kasargod and Badagara Taluks of Kozhikode district. Followed by KDB, Kannur centered Sdhoo beedi is also providing direct branch base employment. It is an organised and registered one. As a result of the decentralisation there exist only 1200 workers at present.

2. Nature of Beedi Industry in North Malabar

Beedi rolling is one of the important traditional industries in North Malabar. There are about 80 thousand beedi workers in North Malabar under the Organised Sector (OS) and the Unorganised Sector (UOS). Of this, 25% belong to the OS and the rest 75% are under UOS.

The Kerala Dinesh Beedi Workers Central Co-operative Society Ltd was organised and registered in February 1968 to rehabilitate the erstwhile beedi workers who were thrown out from the Mangalore centered beedi companies in North Malabar. It provides

employment to 12,000 workers of Kannur, Kasargod and Badagara Taluks of Kozhikode district. Followed by KDB, Kannur centered Sadoo beedi is also providing direct branch base employment. It is an organised and registered one. As a result of the decentralization, there exist only 2400 workers at present.

In North Malabar, the major share of beedi workers are concentrated under the UOS. These workers have no adequate financial benefits compared to the workers of OS. Absence of work stability, lack of minimum wage and non-wage benefits etc are the important features and issues of these types of UOS industries. The major problems that these workers face are deduction of wage, cutting of tendu leaves, inadequate work and lack of trade union activities. There is no statistical evidence to show the exact number of workers under this industry.

3. Politicisation

The concept of politicisation, political participation and political communication are cognate or related to one another in nature. Politicisation broadly implies the orientation of people to political perspective and political action. The need for the politicisation of people arises only in those societies where politics or pursuit of power for public ends does not figure prominently. Politicisation connotes peoples acting as political actors. In various societies, various non political factors such as economic, religious, ethnic, cultural, may dominate the thinking and activities of people. In such cases, efforts may be made to politicise people in the sense that politics is given sufficient importance, attention and place in the affairs of the people.

Politicisation connotes that the person has been educated, informed and trained for playing his part in the political system. It may also connot that the person who is politicised is distinguished by a certain kind of attitude, outlook, opinion, activities, friends and associations. A politicised person may a good member of a party, a good MLA or a good minister, The politicised person will be typical in his outlook and behaviour. Politicisation implies that the person is not only educated or informed or trained but also a little more than necessary or a lot more than necessary or that he is prepared in a way which is not ultimately in his interest or in the interest of the political system in which he seeks to operate. Politicisation is aimed at informing, educating and training the various sections of people in identifying their interests and goals and formulating their demands and arguments as well as designing the various means and measures for the realisation of their interests or goals.

4. Attempt to Politicise the Workers

Other than waging struggle against employers, the workers union also tried to make the workers politically and socially more conscious. The activities are aimed at making the workers conscious of their lot and to bring about a change in their working conditions. Conducting study classes, distributed of printed literature, drama, poetry, public meetings, etc. were the methods used to bring about a radical change in the ideological orientations. The instrument of cultural activities used by the union was aimed at certain immediate aim was to keep the workers nearer to the union by imparting political education to them.

The second aim was to increase the worker's confidence so that they could fight against their employers with increased vigour and determination, facing all sorts of hardships. Another purpose was to give them informal education so as to create more and more social and political awareness in them. The role played by the progressive writers through their books was tremendous.

5. Politicisation among Beedi Workers

It is a peculiar scene in Kerala state rural area that most of the adult male members of the families in an area meet in a nearly teashops and read and listen and discuss current politics over a cup of morning tea. This daily exercise couple with the participation in a day today struggles by unions and political parties make the beedi workers are of the most important working forces in Kerala.

One of the important features of the beedi workers movement in Kannur is the effective use of various communication media, enabling the workers and other sections of the rural people to be aware of overall political situation, not only in the state but also in India and the world. Newspapers, magazines, radio programmes etc are available in simple Malayalam and in plenty. Every public meeting or rally, including street comers meetings organised by political parties, especially left parties became effective means of communication of political ideas. This is in addition to containing political education organised by political parties in the form of party classes or trade union classes which are basically intensive forms of non-formal education.

6. Impact of Politicisation

The organised trade unions have become powerful forces to be reckoned within the politics of the state. The experience of Kerala shows that if the labourers are activated through unions and militant struggle they can play a role no less effective than that of any individual working class. It is a matter of credit to the beedi workers movements in Kerala that they have conducted struggle with popular support and could pressurise the government to bring about radical measures in favour of the rural poor. Through their activities the unions have created an awareness among the public regarding the seriousness of the problem. These have helped the beedi workers to successfully counter the antilabour attitude taken by the management and the government. The measures adopted by the workers to create a favourable opinion to solve their problems are demonstrations, dharnas, picketing, strikes, agitations for better wages and conditions of labour, resistance to the pace of mechanisation etc.

Now the unions can claim a substantial ability in mobilising a large number of beedi labourers in supporters of party activities too. The involvement of union members in frequent political activities leads to intense politicisation of beedi workers.

It is clear from the above analysis that politicisation of beedi workers in Kannur district has reached a level of maturity compared to other workers in Kerala. The attempt made by union leaders to educate them from time to time has also paid rich dividends.

7. Evolution of Beedi Workers as Fighting Class

Beedi workers were mostly drawn from the ranks of a lower caste, the Thiyyars. Thiyyars-or Ezhavas, as they were known in southern Kerala were the intermediate caste below the Brahmins and Nairs, the upper castes. Because the Thiyyars lay in the lower ranks of the caste hierarchy and because they are a large caste group, they could not raise the banner of caste reform without revolting against the caste hierarchy itself. Therefore, the scope of Thiyyars social reform movement was broader than that among many other communities. Tellicherry was the most important center of the Ezhava social reform movement in Malabar. It was there that in 1906 "The Society for Awakening of Knowledge" (Sri. Gnanodaya-yogam) was founded to promote "religion, business, education and social reform."

In the changed atmosphere of caste reform in Tellicherry, the first association of beedi rollers was formed in April 1934. It was named "The Sree Narayana Beedi Workers Association". (Sree Narayana Beedi Thozhilali Sangham) or SNBTS. Its president was Sadhu Siva Prasad, a theosophist and great admirer of Sree Narayana Guru. In the late 1920's he had started a branch of the Madras Labour Union at Kannur. It was a general union that workers in all industries could join.

It is a matter of credit to the Beedi Workers movements in Kerala that they have conducted struggle with popular support and could pressurise to bring about radical measures in favour of the rural poor. The measures adopted by the workers to create a favourable opinion to solve their problems are demonstrations, dharnas, picketing, strikes, agitations for better wages and conditions of labour, resistance to the pace of mechanization etc.

Under the guidance of Congress Socialist Party cadres, trade unions sprang up in all industrial centers and the beedi trade unions always received special attentions. Most prominent CSP leaders, such as A.K. Gopalan, P. Krishna Pillai, K. Damodaran, K.P. Gopalan and C.H. Kanaran were prominent leaders who organised the beedi workers. It is not difficult to understand the connection: the beedi workers constituted one of the most politically conscious sectors of workers in Malabar. C. Kannan recalls the active participation of beedi workers in picketing foreign cloth shops and liquor shops and in taking part in meeting and campaigns of the 1930 civil disobedience agitation.

Beedi workers provided a fertile recruiting ground for the Congress Socialist party. There is hardly a union of workers in Kannur, whose officers or organisers at one time or another had not included beedi workers. The union offices were the centers of political activity in the towns. The beedi union was in charge of most of the court cases of hundreds of peasant prisoners who were jailed in Kannur. A number of beedi cadres even went to Travancore in Southern Kerala to help the Alleppy coir workers in their month strike of 1938.

8. From Congress Socialism to Communism

The spread of trade unions and peasant unions and the militant grounds- well created momentum for a further shift of the Indian independence movement in Malabar. Living in an export -oriented region in the grip of deep economic crisis due to the depression, CSP cadres had developed an admiration for the Soviet Union, which seemed to have escaped the world wide economic malaise. This ideological portion began to distinguish Kerala socialists from the national leadership of the congress socialist party, many of whom were virulently anti communist. With the formation of a communist party secret cell in 1937 by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, N.C. Shekhar, K. Damodaran and P.Krishna Pillai, the availability and systematic dissemination of Marxist literature increased. Systematic study classes and schools were organised. In the six-week training camp for raising a sixty five member communist volunteer corps of workers at Kannur at the initiative of the beedi workers union, the topics included Marxist philosophy, political economy, the history of revolutions and socialism in the Soviet Union. As a participant puts it, each topic and each word of it was new. Before the camp, most of the participants had only vague notions of revolutions and socialism. The camp was a turning point in the ideological education of the participants.

With the onset of World War II, the leftist KPCC set out to mobilize the masses against Indian participation in the war efforts while the national leadership, even though opposed to the war, continued to maneuver decisively. On 1 September 1940, at the outbreak of the war, beedi workers at Kannur organised an antiwar rally. Beedi workers were at the forefront of picketing, army recruitment officers. The leadership of the KPCC were arrested by the government, which only drew a more militant response. The KPCC resolve to observe 15 September 1940 as a 'protest day.' Thus the communists formally parted ways with the congress, but carried along with them the militant peasant and trade unions and some of the best cadres of the national independent movement. For the beedi unions, too, 1940 was the year of transition from congress socialism to communism.

9. Formation of New Trade Unions

Instead of receiving their old unions whose registration had been withdrawn, leaders on the left appealed for a common union of beedi workers regardless of political affiliation. The experiment did not last more than one year. Instead, the trade unions splintered along party lines. The socialist left form their separate union affiliated to the HMS (Hind Mazdoor Sabha) in 1952. The communist led Tellicherry Beedi Thozhilali Union (TBTU) then revived its old registration. In Kannur, communists renamed the organised union the Tobacco Worker's Union (TWU).

After the end of the war, the Indian national Congress had organised own trade unions at Tellicherry and Kannur to counter the influence the communists wielded among the beedi workers. The Swathandra Sozhiali Union (Independent Beedi Workers Union) in Kannur and the beedi Thozhilali Congress (Beedi Workers Congress) in Tellicherry were abolished. But were later affiliated with INTUC (Indian national Trade Congress), the congress party's national union federation. A beedi union of Muslim workers owing allegiance to the Muslim League arose. The pioneering unions in Tellicherry, Kannur and Payyannur continued firmly within the fold of the communist -led- All India Trade union Congress (AITUC). The communist -led unions continued to be dominant organisation.

In 1954 the Tobacco Worker's Union President C. Kannan led a procession that marched more than four hundred kilometers from Kannur to Madras, touring the major beedi centers enroute and recommending immediate legislative action. Partly in response to the agitation, the Beedi and Cigar Industrial Promises Regulation Act was passed by the Madras Legislative Assembly in 1956. But the act created a mini-crisis in the industry as many of the companies closed their factories and shifted to neighbouring states free of labour reputations. The Madras government beat a hasty retreat in 1958 by formally repealing the act.

A national legislation was the only solution to solve this crisis. Shri A.K. Gopalan the then opposition leader of the Indian parliament introduced the Beedi and Cigar Labor Bill in the Indian Parliament in 1956. The Indian Parliament enacted for the first time the legislation for the benefit of Beedi workers viz. the "Beedi and Cigar workers (Conditions of Employment) Act in 1966. It has been considered as the "Magnacarta" of the beedi workers in Kerala. No state government had so far implemented the law passed in 1966. In 1968 Kerala did so.

10. Role of Trade Union among Labourers

The invisibility of women however is not limited to the beedi industry. The Center for Indian Trade Union (CITU), the trade union, federation to workers a majority of the beedi workers belonged had displayed same sensitivity to women's role in the trade unions. KDB's work enter structure encourages women to come out of their homes, by contrast with the policies of private-sector employees that encourage in the home putting out of beedis. By coming to work in centers with many other workers, the women who work at KDB reduce their isolation, learn to share experiences had broaden their horizons. It provides an opportunity for conscious intervention to promote greater gender equality.

The 1987-91 Left Democratic Front ministry initiated a programme propel more women into the share of public life. Elected district councils were established, with a 30 percent set aside for women. Twelve of the fourteen councils ended up with LDE majorities, and 35 percent of members were women. Number of beedi workers were elected to various panchayats and Municipal councils. Now the unions can claim a substantial ability in mobilising a large number of beedi labourers in supporters of party activities too. The involvement of union members in frequent political activities leads to intense politicisation of beedi workers.

Source	Sector	
	Organised	Unorganised
Press and Electronic Media	50.0%	73.6%
Family background	20.0%	5.2%
Discussion with friends	17.0%	12.8%
All above	8.0%	3.2%
Do not know	5.0%	5.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 1: Factors developing in Socio-Political Consciousness
Source: The Survey data 2008.

Majority of beedi workers in both sectors emphasise that press and electronic media play a vital role to mould their socio-political consciousness. About 50% of workers in OS and 73.6% in the UOS supported this view. About 20% workers in the OS are influenced by their family background as against the 5.2% in the UOS. Around 17% in the OS and 12.8% in the UOS workers are influenced by the discussion with their friends. About 5% workers in both sectors did not make any opinion in this regard.

11. Influence of Media of Politicisation of Beedi Workers

One of the important features of the beedi workers movements in Kannur is the relatively effective are of various communication media, enabling the workers and other sections of the rural poor to be aware of overall political situation, not only in the state but also in India and the world. Newspapers, Magazines, radio programmes etc are available in simple Malayalam and in plenty is the leading Malayalam daily influence the politicization of the beedi workers in Kannur. Every public meeting or rally, including street corner meetings becomes effective means of communication of Political ideas.

12. Press Media

The political awareness and information of the workers here are summed up in the lines of the late Mr. G. K. Panicker IAS, the workers had been politically well informed. If one would visit the work centres, he would be surprised to find out that one of the workers would reading newspapers for the benefit of all the workers in that center, not merely one paper, but all the prominent vernacular dailies. This might be with a view to get all viewpoints. By the evening, all other workers contribute beedies to this READER and he also would have his amount of beedies as other workers and earn an equal wage. This reading is done by them in turn. The workers have been very conscious of their rights and unrest among them on account of various demands has also been a normal feature in Cannanore. In fact, the district had been notorious for unrest among beedi workers. There would be disturbance in one region or other of the district, at any given point of time.

What inspired the Congress Socialist Party workers to start 'Prabhatham' was 'Iskra' started by Lenin before the October revolution in Russia. 'prabhatham' was started in 1935 from Shornur and later from Kozhikode. In the meantime, 'Thozhilali' was brought out from Alleppy. It is said to have mouthed the voice of the workers and influenced the struggle against Sir. C.P Ramaswami Aiyar, the Diwan of Travancore who was considered anti people.

News paper	Organised		Unorganised	
	Regularly	Some times	Regularly	Some times
Deshabhimani	40%	32%	7.2%	14.6%
Mathrubhoomi	28%	29%	13.7%	32.4%
Malayala Manorama	14%	14%	11.7%	15.6%
Janmabhoomi	-	6%	0.4%	2.5%
Madhyamam	-	9%	0.4%	1.8%
Kerala Kaumudi	11%	11%	1.6%	6.8%
Other papers	10%	6%	1.4%	21%

Table 2: Readability of Newspapers among Workers

Source: The Survey data 2014.

The Table shows that 72% of Beedi workers in the OS read *Deshabhimani*. Workers in OS were left oriented. However, the educated beedi workers in the OS read all the Malayalam newspapers to get a correct idea about political changes in their surroundings.

Another important media to influence the politicisation of beedi workers is radio. Radio is installed in every unit. From radio they get local and national news and various other relevant topics relating to international importance. Many respondents used to hear political discourses of important political leaders through radio. These programmes awaken the workers about the political developments at local, regional and international level.

The beedi workers have actively participated in political activities. They had faced punishments and hardships due to their party affiliations. Enquiries were also made about the financial contribution made by each respondent to political parties. Almost all the respondents contributed generously to political parties. From the information gathered, it is clear that giving contribution to parties other than those, to whom they are affiliated, is not rare. This is clear from the number of persons who participate in the political activities and give financial contributions.

13. Deshabhimani

The new papers which walked along with the national freedom movement were in a sizeable number in English. To some extent, there were a few newspapers in Malayalam too. In the all India level, there were Congress Socialist, national Front, New Age, People's War, people's Age, Cross Roads etc, which had a leaning towards the working class. But ceased to exist soon. Formed in 1935, "Prabhatham" was closed down in 1935. Deshabhimani was born from the ashes of "Thozhilali" and "Prabhatham". It was soon after the August Revolution-Quit India Movement EMS puts it this way. "The opposition of the communist party to the Quit India Movement rallied the vested interests and the anti-communist intellectual mercenaries to intensify the anti-communist tirade Deshabhimani simply emerged from fire.

What was always neglected by the academics were the role of the party press among the working class. They analysed the role it had on the intellectuals and the middle class. An attempt was made by the researcher had proved that Deshabhimani despite its unattractiveness and lack of easy readability had been to creep in to shape the view of the discerning readers created by itself among a section of the working class. The opposed of the left too were swayed by the newspaper as they too admitted to have been influence by it. The role, played by Deshabhimani in shaping the views of workers enabled political manipulations, which was always a big debate. The impact of various other newspapers including Malayala Manorama, Mathurbhumi etc on beedi workers are also very high. Another important media to influence the politicisation of beedi workers is radio. Radio is installed in every unit. From radio they are getting local and national news and various other relevant topics relating to international importance. Many respondents used to hear political discourses of important political leaders through radio. These programmes awaken the workers about the political incidents happening in their surroundings.

Kerala Dinesh Beedi Society has succeeded in inculcating the co-operative behaviour in the trade unionists. they have succeeded in their effort to make use of the trade union discipline to develop this organisation. Union leaders take responsibility for aiding management in transmitting unpopular policies to the workers. Union activities persuade the workers to take their personal leaves to avoid the build up of stocks during the off seasons. Another important media to influence the politicisation of beedi workers is radio. Radio is installed in every unit. From radio they get local and national news and various other relevant topics relating to international importance. Many respondents used to hear political discourses of important political leaders through radio. These programmes awaken the workers about the political developments at local, regional and international level.

The beedi workers have actively participated in political activities. They had faced punishments and hardships due to their party affiliations. Enquiries were also made about the financial contribution made by each respondent to political parties. Almost all the respondents contributed generously to political parties. From the information gathered, it is clear that giving contribution to parties other than those, to whom they are affiliated, is not rare. This is clear from the number of persons who participate in the political activities and give financial contributions.

14. Influence of Political Parties

The Beedi workers have actively participated in political activities. They had faced punishments and hardships due to their party affiliations. Enquiries were also made about the financial contribution made by each respondent to political parties. Almost all the respondents contributed generously to political parties. From the information gathered from the labourers it is clear that giving contribution to parties other than those to whom they are affiliated, is not rare. This is clear from the number of persons who participate in the political activities and give financial contributions. The qualitatively better involvement of so the unions and unionism of its members is also reflected in the politicisations and the political participations of beedi workers in Kannur.

15. Influence of Political Parties on Beedi Trade Union

In Kerala, the trade union organisation is, in most cases, affiliated to political parties. But there are a few independent unions also. Though independent unions are not directly affiliated to political parties, quite a few leaders of such unions are found to be associated with one political party or other. Such unions are able to attract members having different political leanings. Table gives the attitude of beedi workers towards political parties.

Opinion	Sector	
	Organised	Unorganised
Very much	70.0%	7.6%
Up to an extent	9.0%	42.1%
Not at all	21.0%	50.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3: Attitude of Workers about Interest in Political Party

Source: The Survey data 2014.

Significant at 5% level of significance

Chi Square value = 231.6 P-value = 0.000

Table 6.13 shows that in OS, 70 % workers are very much interested in political parties but in the UOS it is only 7.6 %. Chi square test shows that there is significant difference between two sectors with respect to the issue concerned.

As the recruitment of the workers of the Dinesh Beedi Co-operative Society is mainly based on political line, workers are interested in political parties. In the co-operative beedi sector, a major share of workers are the supporters of the CPI(M). The workers treated the co-operative society as their party institution. The main stream left parties like CPI(M) and CPI have party level committees with representatives in such groups as staff unions, trade unions and worker directors. The style of functioning of both the management and the unions ensures that conflicts are mostly kept within limits. Serious conflicts have been resolved through mediation of the communist parties.¹ But in the UOS 50 % of beedi workers do not have any attitude to political parties. They do not participate in any programme organised by political parties.

In an attitude survey, N. Mohanan found that most of the KDB workers (83%) are satisfied with their working conditions and organisations (30% in the UOS). But small a section of workers in both sectors i.e., (13% in the KDB and 10% in the UOS workers) are only satisfied with the existing wage rate. In the KDB, 75% of the workers are confident on the stability of their work. At the same time, it is only 20% in the UOS. On the whole, this data shows that compare to UOS, the working condition, satisfaction of the workers about the functions of their institution and employment security are far better in the OS.

Party	Sector	
	Organised	Unorganised
CPI (M)	68.0%	32.6%
Congress (I)	2.0%	18.5%
BJP	-	9.4%
CPI	1.0%	.9%
IUML	-	.2%
Any other	26%	18.9%
Do not reveal	3.0%	19.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table 4: Party Representation among Beedi Workers

Source: The Survey data 2014.

The workers in the OS are interested in the political activities of North Malabar. Even though the party supporters in the UOS are not insignificant, they belong to different political parties unlike in the OS. But, the OS workers are concentrated in a single party CPI(M) (68%). They involve very actively in all party activities like processions and public meetings. As it is a factory system, they can be organised by the political parties very easily. Political parties with communal colour like BJP and IUML do not have any place among

the OS workers. The CPI(M) organises many political activities among the beedi workers and aim at making workers conscious of their role. Almost all agitations led by the CPI(M) in North Malabar were supported by beedi workers.

But in the UOS, only 32.6 % of workers are in the CPI (M). Workers in the UOS mainly concentrate in the interior, non – CPI (M) areas of Kasaragod District. No political party has dominance among them. About 19.6 % workers did not reveal their party identity.

16. Conclusion

The emergence of trade union movement in beedi industry was a response to the deplorable labour condition in the industry as well as the larger political and social currents in North Malabar. It played vital role in all the agitations led by beedi workers before and after the independence. The beedi workers through strong agitations acquired the achievements. In beedi establishments like KDB, even the non-wage benefits are fixed through local negotiations with management represented in central society. The trade unions directly participate in implementing the social security scheme.

Job in the organised / formal sector is being lost all rounds. The unions fear that under ruthless competitive pressures, employers may take such steps to effect further thinning of the organised formal sector. The UOS does not enjoy any effective social protection. So workers in the UOS are more concerned with keeping their jobs than demanding further improvement in their working conditions.

In the era of globalisation, many trade unions are witnessing declining membership. Today unions are kept out of joint consultations and decision-making process. To some employers, unions have become a nuisance. Now union leadership is trying to use all the means at their disposal to send the message to the workers that the time has come for them to stand united, locate their common enemy and build strategies to collectively fight to regain the lost ground.

Once the beedi co-operatives were unable to provide full time employment to the workers, they left for other avenues of employment. A large chunk of male workers left their occupation due to low wages and other hardships and migrated to other occupations. As of now, female participation of workers in the industry is very high. This factor also affects the consolidation of the trade union activities negatively. Many trade unions are witnessing declining membership.

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